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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
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WASHINGTON, D.C.



9 SEP 1976

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF:

IN

SUBJECT:

"Escape from Indochina -- South Vietnam a Year After the Fall" (U)

TO:

The Honorable Hank Knoche  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

1. (C) You may recall that in late June we sent you and other members of the National Foreign Intelligence Board some of the highlights resulting from the debriefing of HO KIM HAI, the former Vietnamese Air Force helicopter pilot who escaped to Thailand in his UH-1 helicopter, together with his wife, four children, and his flight mechanic.

2. (U) At the time, we promised to forward a wrap-up of the significant information obtained from the debriefing. That wrap-up has now been completed, and we are pleased to forward a copy herewith.

1 Atch  
"Escape from Indochina" (C)  
1 cy

*Handwritten signature: G. J. Keegan, Jr.*

GEORGE J. KEEGAN, JR.  
Major General, USAF  
Asst Chief of Staff, Intelligence

USAF review(s)  
completed.

Classified by: ACS/L, HQ USAF  
EXEMPT FROM GENERAL  
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OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652  
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# *Escape from Indochina*

**SOUTH VIETNAM  
A YEAR AFTER THE FALL**



**AUGUST 1976**

**7602d AIR INTELLIGENCE GROUP  
FORT BELVOIR, VIRGINIA 22060**

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# ESCAPE FROM INDOCHINA

*South Vietnam a Year After the Fall*

August 1976

7602d Air Intelligence Group  
Fort Belvoir, Virginia, 22060

W A R N I N G

This document is classified CONFIDENTIAL to protect the sources of the information contained herein and their association with the 7602d Air Intelligence Group. It also serves to protect the activities and identity of those former members of the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) who are still active in Vietnam. Classified portions of the document are so marked; other portions may be excerpted and used if the above caveats are observed.

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F O R E W O R D

Since the collapse of the South Vietnamese Government in April 1975, the flow of information on conditions existing there has been reduced to a trickle. This situation changed dramatically in early March of this year, when a former South Vietnamese Air Force pilot escaped to Thailand in a UH-1 helicopter, bringing with him his family and crew chief.

The intelligence reporting which stemmed from the subsequent in-depth debriefing of this escapee and his family has now been synthesized in this book, which we believe will shed light on a great many hitherto obscure areas concerning conditions in Vietnam today. It should be pointed out that this pilot served under the Communists after the fall of South Vietnam and was entrusted by the North Vietnamese to continue flying for them. This gave him a unique vantage point from which to observe the day-to-day operations of the North Vietnamese Air Force in the South and to converse with Communist officers and cadre on a wide range of military and political topics.

Much of the information on the following pages has since been confirmed. Other portions of this account, although impossible to verify, appear to present a good picture of conditions as they exist in Vietnam today.



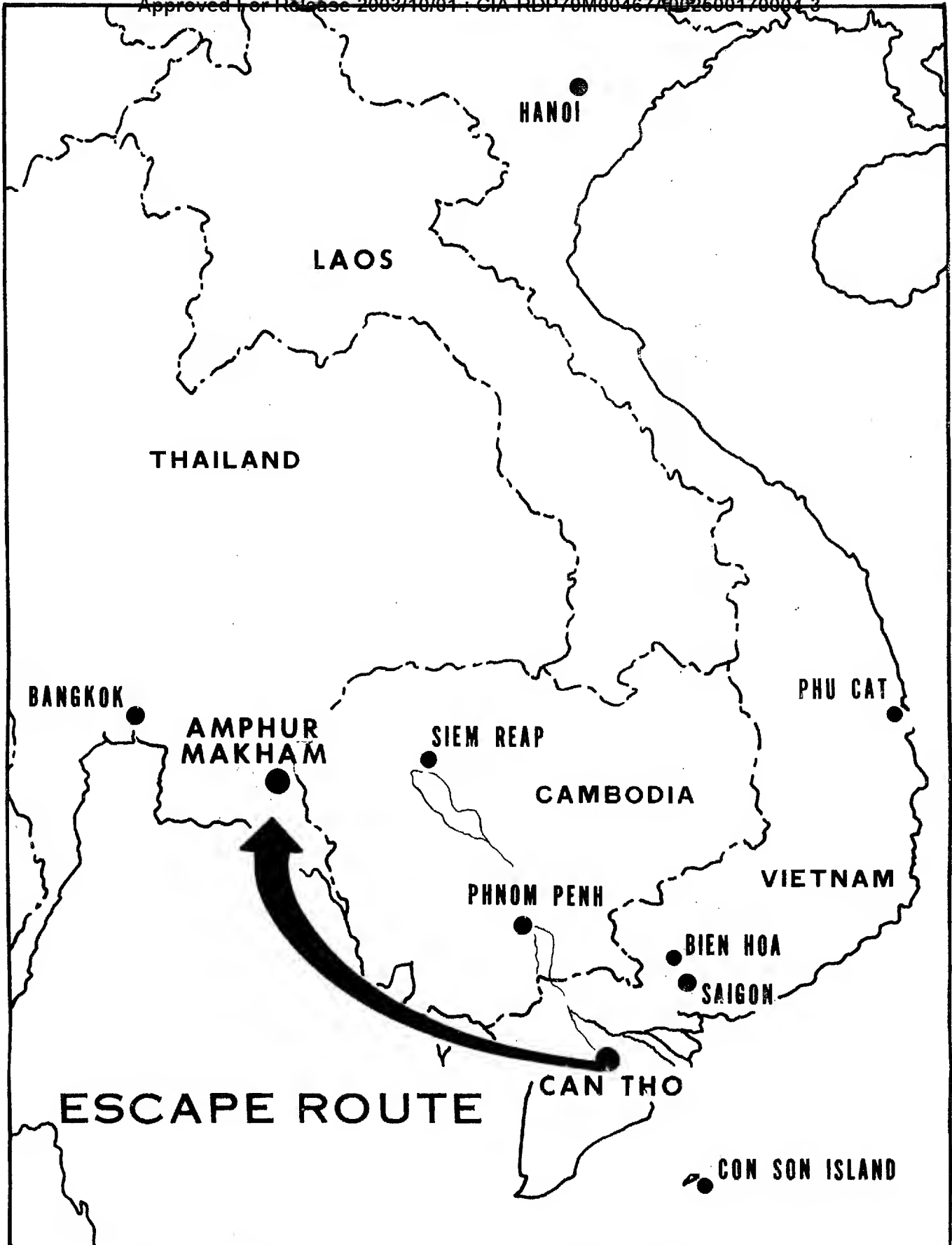
RICHARD F. HUM, Colonel, USAF  
Commander

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THE ESCAPE

At 1030 hours on the morning of Monday, 8 March 1976, former Vietnamese Air Force Lt HO KIM HAI successfully landed his US-built UH-1 helicopter in the small Thai village of Amphur Makham, 130 miles southeast of Bangkok in Chantaburi Province and 225 miles from the nearest Vietnamese landmass.

Accompanying HAI on this first known airborne escape from Vietnam since the collapse of the country were his wife, NGUYEN THI THUAN, his four young children, and his flight mechanic, former Sgt NGUYEN VAN THANG.

HAI explained that he had fled his country, after two months of planning, because he and his family could no longer endure the political pressures and other hardships of the Communist regime. After imprisonment in a work camp in Can Tho from May to August, 1975, HAI was released to fly the UH-1 for the North Vietnamese Air Force (NVAF) at Binh Thuy Air Base. By October he had persuaded the NVAF to use him as a test pilot. At first he was accompanied on test flights by two guards but, by January 1976, he had earned such a

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reputation for recklessness in the air that the guards preferred to watch him from the ground.

On the morning of the escape, he was scheduled to test hop a UH-1 that was to carry officials to Chau Doc later in the day. Using the excuse that he planned to fly the full route to Chau Doc and return as part of the flight test, HAI managed to get a full load of 1000 liters of fuel and to have his flight mechanic accompany him. By prior arrangement, he rendezvoused with his family in a field about two kilometers east of Binh Thuy, and, after persuading the mechanic to accompany them to Thailand, he set off for U-Tapao Air Base.

Flying low from the start in order to avoid radar detection, HAI skirted the Cambodian coast and, with no fuel left, landed his aircraft at a gas station in the village of Amphur Makham. The helicopter was immediately surrounded by Thai police and the seven escapees were taken into custody. HAI told the police he was happy to be free and would face the consequences of his unauthorized flight as long as he was not sent back to Vietnam. HAI subsequently requested assistance in going to the United States with his family.

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After holding Lt HAI and his family in custody in Amphur Makham for a few days, the Thai authorities moved the escapees to a detention camp near Korat until their eventual disposition could be worked out. After some negotiation between the US State Department, the American Embassy, Bangkok, and the Royal Thai Government, Detachment 5 of the 7602d Air Intelligence Group accepted custody of the refugees, moved them to a house in Bangkok on 7 May 1976, and immediately began in-depth debriefings.

When the former VNAF pilot and his family were moved to San Francisco on 21 May, the debriefings were resumed in that city, using a special team of 7602d Air Intelligence Group personnel. What follows is the substance of what has been learned through this debriefing effort concerning conditions in Vietnam since the fall of that country to the Communists.

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LIFE IN THE PRISON CAMP

Once South Vietnam had fallen, the North Vietnamese lost no time rounding up former members of the South Vietnamese military. On 1 May 1975, the first full day of North Vietnamese control, the former Airbase Wing Commander of the Binh Thuy Airbase appeared on television, directing all VNAF personnel in the area to report to the base on 4 May.

When he reported as directed, HAI was required to surrender his VNAF ID card and his weapon permit, and in return was given a slip of paper bearing only his name and the date he reported.

During the following two weeks, Saigon radio broadcast instructions for all first and second lieutenants in the Can Tho area to report to the Phan Thanh Gian High School on 15 May. They were directed to bring along clothing and enough money -- 13,300 South Vietnamese piasters -- for food for a month, to be paid when they reported in.

Lt HAI reported on the 15th, along with about 2,000 other officers. They were classified in alphabetical order by name, rather than by service, and assigned, 20 to a room, in the former classrooms. The men were forced to sleep on the floor and were permitted no cooking privileges.

The seven-day-a-week daily routine was unvarying, beginning with awakening each morning at 0600, no breakfast, work details in the vegetable gardens, Communist headquarters, or mine-clearing operations, and ending with lights out at 2100 hours. Doors were locked at 2200 hours and guards were always posted. Two meals a day were served, each man receiving two bowls of rice with vegetables and fish, but this ration was cut in half after the first month. Each day included two hours of political indoctrination, with each officer taking daily turns as discussion leader.

Lt HAI stressed that this was not a reindoctrination camp per se, but a prison/work camp. NVA political officers visited the prisoners frequently, usually a captain but occasionally as high in rank as a lieutenant colonel, who lectured and rebuked the men on their past crimes.

Pilots were castigated as the greatest enemy of the people because of the death and destruction they had caused, followed by officers who had served in artillery or armored units.

At first, the prisoners' families were permitted half-hour visits on Saturdays and Sundays, but this privilege was withdrawn after the first month. Both outgoing and incoming mail continued, but was subject to censorship.

There were no escapes or escape attempts while Lt HAI was detained in the camp, although the prisoners never ceased to discuss escape plans. Although at least six men were killed while clearing mines, no one was killed or tortured by the NVA. The communists provided no medicines and very little medical care; the prisoners had to rely on their families for whatever medicines they could provide. As a result, some men died and about half of the prisoners suffered from malaria in varying degrees. Only the very ill were sent to hospitals.

Until the day before, Lt HAI had no warning of his

impending release, nor did his wife. In August 1975, he was freed along with five other UH-1 pilots and immediately taken by truck to Binh Thuy AB. He managed to write a note, and as he passed his uncle's house in Can Tho, he threw it from the truck. The uncle delivered it to his family. HAI later learned from a VNAF mechanic that the camp was closed in September 1975 and all the remaining prisoners sent to the camp at Chi Lang in Chau Doc Province.

NORTH VIETNAMESE TREATMENT OF FORMER VNAF PERSONNEL

Ever since the fall of the country, former VNAF personnel have posed a dilemma to the North Vietnamese. On the one hand, as former enemy military personnel, VNAF people constituted a high security risk to the North Vietnamese, who understandably did not trust them. On the other hand, without their help, the NVAF would never be able to fly or maintain the hundreds of aircraft captured in the course of the collapse of the country.

For these reasons, the North Vietnamese have exhibited a certain ambivalence in their treatment of former VNAF pilots and mechanics. Treatment of these people varied, partly due, apparently, to where they had originally been captured. According to both HAI and THANG, airmen caught in the area north of Phan Thiet as far as Da Nang, in former Military Regions I and II, were categorized as prisoners of war, while those captured south of Phan Thiet, in III and IV Corps, were termed "surrenderers."

The length of time the former South Vietnamese military were held in detention camps also varied. One NVA officer remarked to Lt HAI that he had been very lucky, since HAI had been held only from May to August 1975, but many POWs are still in detention. HAI tells of one group of former 3rd Air Division officers who were not released from the Lai Khe Reeducation Camp until February 1976. And HAI remembers one occasion, in late 1975 or early 1976, when he overheard several high-ranking North Vietnamese officers mention that eleven former VNAF pilots were still being held on Con Son Island. The "air pirates," as they were called, reportedly were captured there on 1 May 1975, as they were attempting to escape.

The North Vietnamese themselves cannot seem to agree on a standard policy toward former VNAF pilots. HAI states that the NVAF would have preferred to have all South Vietnamese flying personnel released from detention, but camp officials, citing the security risks inherent in such a move, demanded that the NVAF vouch in writing for the pilots' reliability, and this the NVAF would not do.

Once released from detention, former VNAF pilots

and ground crew personnel have been put to work by the NVAF. For example, at Binh Thuy, the NVAF has formed "cells" of thirty former VNAF mechanics, each cell responsible for all engine and airframe maintenance on the UH-1, U-17, O-1, and A-37 aircraft stationed there. Two NVAF officers are in charge of all maintenance, one of whom is a trained maintenance officer on the MIG-21. This officer reportedly spent seven or eight years in the USSR studying engineering, and now is described as very eager to pick the brains of the former VNAF mechanics.

Nominally, the UH-1 maintenance cell is supervised by a NVAF NCO who is rotated every other month, but he is a mere figurehead; the group is actually supervised by a former VNAF senior NCO. Sgt THANG said that, as late as March 1976, NVAF mechanics were still unable to perform any maintenance on the UH-1.

Once released, former VNAF pilots also have been pressed into service by the NVAF. One former VNAF officer, an A-37 pilot, was one of the first to report to the new authorities. He has now completed training all NVAF MIG pilots of the 937th Air Defense Regiment

at Binh Thuy, some of whom, in turn, also have now become A-37 instructor pilots. These men were then returned to Phan Rang Airbase to form a flying school, using T-37 aircraft left intact when that base was evacuated in April 1975.

Two other A-37 pilots from the 61st Fighter Wing at Da Nang were ordered to train NVAF Senior Colonel TRAN HANH to fly the A-37 immediately after the fall of Da Nang in March 1975. Colonel HANH then flew as pilot in the third A-37 of the three-plane strike on Tan Son Nhut Airbase on 28 April 1975. Colonel HANH, a famed NVAF MIG ace, is credited with at least 15 US aircraft kills.

One former VNAF F-5 pilot, Lt NGUYEN GIA CAN, after being released from the Lai Khe Reeducation Camp in February 1976, was sent to Bien Hoa Airbase, where he was put on a special diet designed to build up his strength for flying duty. CAN ate with the NVAF jet pilots, who are fed according to NVAF "jet pilot standards." Others are fed according to a "propellor pilot diet." After a month of rest and recuperation on this diet, CAN was tasked with training NVAF pilots on the F-5E radar system.

Other VNAF pilots participated in the campaign to suppress resistance forces near Da Lat and Ban Me Thuot, some flying FACs and others flying UH-1 slicks and gunships.

According to Lt HAI, at the time of his escape, there was a plan afoot to deploy former VNAF pilots and mechanics from Binh Thuy to all four corps areas, since no former VNAF were working at Da Nang, Pleiku, Phu Cat, or Nha Trang.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN VIETNAM

... In Saigon

During Mrs. HAI's last visit to Saigon on 4 March 1976, she strolled through the downtown shopping areas, observing the activity there. At the Central Market, she saw hundreds of people trying to buy various luxury goods such as watches, jewelry, and transistor radios from passers-by. These are then resold to NVA soldiers as a source of income. On Ham Nghi Street there is a large thieves' market where people come each day trying to sell personal possessions, including their own clothing.

Along Le Thanh Ton Street, behind the Central Market and leading toward the Continental Hotel, gangs of youths aged 13 to 16 have been active in stealing watches, jewelry, and money in broad daylight. The gangs were reportedly organized by the resistance movement to create disturbances for the security forces and at the same time to obtain funds.

A lively black market in currency exists, with the dollar apparently having the most value. Mrs. HAI was approached many times and asked if she had dollars to sell. After the currency exchange in September 1975,

the value of gold tripled (from 32,000 South Vietnamese piasters to 100,000 for one tael of gold leaf). In February 1976, six days after Tet, the Communists imposed a curfew so a census could be taken. This sparked a rumor that another currency exchange was coming and sent the price of gold soaring to 700,000 South Vietnamese piasters for one tael of gold.

According to Lt HAI, this, combined with the shortage of rice and other foodstuffs, has resulted in skyrocketing prices since April 1975. A packet of Capstan cigarettes that cost 275 piasters at the time of the fall now sells for 2,000 to 2,500 piasters. The poor have been hit particularly hard by the soaring prices and the flourishing black market. Some have not had the money to purchase rice.

HAI observed that the fixed prices set on commodities apply only to purchases by Communist military personnel; prices for the ordinary citizen are always higher.

In Saigon, all the homes of those who fled in April 1975 have been appropriated to North Vietnamese cadre and their families. The people find it grimly amusing

that many of the cadre's wives have already become corrupted by the dresses, jewelry, and homes they "liberated." Their newly acquired tastes even extend to such things as cosmetics and Western style music, usually deemed decadent in Communist societies.

Mrs. HAI heard that those cadre who had gone to North Vietnam in 1954 and who were now allowed to return to visit relatives in Saigon were being detained upon their return north, supposedly to purify them of tales of the luxuries of Saigon.

... In the Countryside

Mrs. HAI's last visit to Saigon was by bus. At each checkpoint on the bus route, male travelers were required to present their reeducation certification and the travel permit issued by district security officials. En route, Mrs. HAI witnessed the arrest of several men who lacked the required papers. The checkpoints, manned by uniformed NVA troops, were located at every major intersection.

At one point, where the bus crossed the Mekong River, Mrs. HAI observed long convoys of trucks, loaded

to capacity with rice, being driven to North Vietnam by South Vietnamese civilian drivers. She states that the Communists are stripping the South of rice and preventing it from being brought into Saigon in order to force the population out into the countryside. Travelers are checked for any rice they may be carrying at the numerous roadblocks, and any amount over one liter is confiscated in exchange for a receipt.

The rice fields of farmers in the Delta have been appraised for expected yields, and the estimate posted on the perimeter of the fields. If the estimated yield is not met, the farmer faces a penalty. The crop, when harvested, may not be sold in the cities, but instead is bought by the government in exchange for scrip, with only enough rice left for family consumption.

As a result, this year many farmers are reluctant to cultivate their land, because they know if they produce more than their assigned yield, they are liable either to an increase in the yield estimate or confiscation of the surplus, or both.

... In the Schools

Less than a month after the fall of the country, in May 1975, education cadres began to visit every home, urging parents to register their children for elementary school. During the evenings, teachers gathered local groups of children together in the neighborhoods and taught them songs and dances of the revolution, the fight against the French, and later the American imperialists.

In the schools, even basic arithmetic problems are heavily tainted with war and revolution. As an example, a problem might state, "A group of six American invaders is on patrol to terrorize our population. Our revolutionary fighters ambush them and kill three or four. How many are left?" HAI's children were upset over having to hear about more killing when peace had supposedly arrived.

Mrs. HAI cited the following examples of songs about Ho Chi Minh which the children would sing both before and after class:

"Last night, I saw Uncle Ho in my dreams,  
His beard is long, and his hair is all silver-like.  
I tenderly kissed both of his cheeks,

I happily danced, I happily sang.

He nodded his head; he commended me on my good behavior.

Last night, I saw Uncle Ho in my dreams,  
I was already awake, but still dreaming dreams.  
I tenderly kissed both of his cheeks,  
Happily beside him, I danced and sang.  
He smiled and he commended me on my good behavior."

One feature of the new system which particularly upset the HAI family and played an important part in Lt HAI's decision to escape South Vietnam was that, not only was he labeled a lackey because of his past service to the Government of Vietnam, but that his children's birth certificate would be stamped on the back with "son (or daughter) of a puppet officer." All children born of South Vietnamese parents who had cooperated with the old regime or were members of the former armed forces were so stigmatized. HAI found the words "lackey" and "puppet" revolting and did not want to suffer this humiliation, nor did he want his children to have to endure it throughout their future.

... In the Churches and Temples

After an incident in Saigon's Vinh Son Cathedral, in which an underground radio station, a printing press, and resistance movement personnel were captured, there were reports in Can Tho of many attempts to incriminate local priests and pastors. Mrs. HAI heard that some priests were framed by NVA cadre, who, while ostensibly visiting the church, secreted rounds of small arms ammunition, pamphlets, a small pistol, and even a grenade in a cache where the contraband could be "discovered" a few hours later by security personnel. Other priests reportedly were detained for no apparent reason.

Mrs. HAI is a Buddhist, as is her father, but other family members are Roman Catholics, and she fears that, now that the Communists control all of Vietnam, they will "eventually exterminate" the Catholics (her exact words) -- especially those who fled to the South after partition.

On her last trip from Can Tho to Saigon, Mrs. HAI observed that all of the religious shrines, altars, and flags normally displayed in front of the homes of members of the Hoa Hao religious sect had been removed.

Mrs. HAI was told the Communists had ordered the destruction of all such religious displays. She commented that the Hoa Hao may someday revolt.

... Reprisals

After South Vietnam fell, it became, for all practical purposes, a "closed" country to representatives of the Western press. There was considerable speculation that the North Vietnamese were taking reprisals against their former enemy -- members of the former South Vietnamese military and government officials. Rumors of executions and "blood baths" circulated freely, but the first reliable indication that such reprisals did indeed take place emerged from the testimony of Lt HAI's wife and his flight mechanic, Sgt NGUYEN VAN THANG.

Within days after the fall of Can Tho on 30 April 1975, THANG said sound trucks cruised the streets of the town, warning that certain classes of "high crimes" against the people (that is, against the North Vietnamese) were punishable by death. Sgt THANG remembers that these crimes included continuing to fight against the "Liberation Forces" beyond 30 April; having rallied to the South and assisted the Saigon government; and

having held certain civilian or military positions under the defeated government.

The first execution occurred near the end of May. The day before the shooting was to take place, sound trucks announced that Colonel HO NGOC CAN, Chief of Chuong Thien Province, would be publicly tried at the soccer field. On the following day a large crowd of townspeople and soldiers watched as a petty thief was denounced and shot.

Immediately afterward, Colonel CAN was led out onto the field and a statement of charges against him were read. The principal charge was that he was personally responsible for two thousand NVA casualties between 30 April and the date of his capture in mid-May. He also was accused of stealing rice, but the townspeople understood that this had been in order to supply his still-active forces.

The crowd was asked to judge whether or not the colonel should die, and all the Communist soldiers present, plus perhaps a few of the townspeople, voted "yea." The captive was then tied, standing, to a post in front of a sandbagged wall on the athletic field.

Shouting defiantly, he was heard to exclaim that he could not commit suicide because he was a Catholic. A three-man squad, armed with AK's, fired a salvo at the captive, seriously wounding him. After one more anti-Communist shout, a second salvo took him out of his misery. The mood of the onlookers was one of disgust and chagrin.

A movie was made of the execution that was later shown on Can Tho television. Photographs of the trial and execution also were displayed in the library near the house of the former IV Corps commander in Can Tho.

Following somewhat the same pattern, in August and September 1975 the Communists proceeded to execute the province and district chiefs, and members of the self-defense forces of Vinh Long Province, especially those of Binh Minh District. This was presumably in retaliation for the stiff resistance this area had offered in February 1975, when the Communists had tried to cut Route 4, the main highway running through the area from the Delta to Saigon. In addition, two or three people -- mostly ralliers -- were shot each day along the main roads of the area, which is heavily populated by members of the Hoa Hao sect. Mrs. HAI personally saw

several bodies lying along Route 4 during a trip from Can Tho to Vinh Long and witnessed two other executions at the Vinh Long soccer field. Virtually all Hoi Chanh (ralliers under the Chieu Hoi program) were shot as they were captured, but some were given "trials" along with other "criminals."

In October 1975, the Communists attempted to stage a public trial and execution of the former chief of Phung Hiep District, Phong Dinh province, at the Can Tho soccer field. The onlookers chose this occasion to display their disgust with the continued slayings. When asked for the pro forma vote, the people shouted for the killings to stop and demanded the prisoner's release. According to popular rumor, the district chief was taken across the Mekong River and later shot secretly. It was also generally believed that the punitive executions were continuing, but in secret.

### ... The Cuban Influence

Many of the new economic programs being put into effect by the North Vietnamese are apparently due to significant assistance received from the Cubans. During his political indoctrination classes at Binh

Thuy, Lt HAI was told about the economic aid that Cuba was providing and about a five-year plan, from 1976 to 1981, under which the Cubans would assist the Vietnamese in growing sugar cane and sugar beets and help in developing the fishing industry,

One of these new programs was the establishment in 1975 of several "new economic zones" throughout South Vietnam where reluctant South Vietnamese are being forced to settle and farm. According to HAI, because life is so difficult in the new economic areas, almost sixty percent of the people resettled in those zones have fled them.

One such "new economic zone" has been established in the Duc Co, Pleiku, Tieu Ata area of the South Vietnamese highlands. It was rumored that fifteen Communist divisions, totalling 150,000 men, were being sent to the highlands to clear the land and plant sugar cane and sugar beets. This zone is to be a "showcase" to the South Vietnamese, and when the crops take hold, the NVA soldiers will be encouraged to bring their families south and settle there permanently, to be joined later by the people from the cities (in the words of the

political reeducation teachers) "after they've spent everything they have."

Seed for the sugar cane and beets will be provided by Cuba, and Cuban agricultural technicians will teach the Vietnamese how to plant, grow, and harvest the crops. South Vietnam has been given a target of exporting one billion dollars worth of sugar by 1981 and, according to the political officers, until that time "no South Vietnamese will taste so much as one grain of sugar."

In their political indoctrination classes, the former VNAF pilots were told that Vietnam now has some of the finest fishing grounds in the world and, now that peace has arrived, the fishing industry will be greatly expanded. The Cubans are assisting by building a fish cannery at Rach Gia, in Kien Giang Province.

All fishing boats have now been nationalized and the former captains put on a salaried basis. In spite of the fact that each boat now carries two or three NVA guards, many still try to escape by that method.

According to the political officers, the Government of North Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government

signed an economic agreement under which North Vietnam would concentrate on industrial development, while South Vietnam would place its emphasis on agriculture and fishing. According to one of HAI's political instructors, the South Vietnamese people are to be reduced to the status of serfs.

SABOTAGE AND RESISTANCE ACTIVITY SINCE THE FALL

... Among the Military

(U) Although South Vietnam fell on 30 April 1975, the fighting did not cease on that day. Instead of surrendering and disbanding, some military units remained together and continued to resist from isolated pockets and strongholds. For example, the U Minh Forest in the Delta became the base of operations for the 33rd Regiment of the 21st ARVN Division. As the Viet Cong returned to their homes at the end of the war, the 33rd took over the bases of their old enemy and are reportedly still very active. They have distributed propaganda leaflets and flags which are used as safe-conduct passes to the resistance movement base areas.

(U) Another group, reportedly the 45th Regiment of the 23rd ARVN Division, attacked Phu Cat Air Base during the night sometime in July or August 1975. Lt HAI was told about the raid by a young NVAF airman who had been sleeping in a room on the base along with nine others when the attack began. A bandit (the young soldier's term for the ARVN soldiers) threw a grenade into the room,

killing six and wounding four of the occupants, including the young airman. The NVA airman told HAI that this was the most terrifying night of his life.

The attackers held Phu Cat throughout that night and the following day until the base was retaken by an NVA division. The young airman told HAI that there had been a great many attackers and that they had inflicted heavy casualties. HAI later was told that Phu Cat had been seized in order to capture supplies.

... Among Ethnic and Religious Minority Groups

(U) Resistance groups are not limited to former military units. According to a political officer at Bien Hoa, a resistance group consisting of former Catholic refugees from North Vietnam has been formed in the area just north of that city. The group, whose strength is unknown, is led by their former parish priest in Hanoi. It has been operating around Rung La in Long Khanh Province. On 1 March 1976, while Lt HAI was on SAR standby at Bien Hoa Air Base, he was told that the base had been shelled earlier that day by resistance forces, possibly by this group. There was no apparent damage.

(U) Another group, known as the FULRO forces (acronym for "Front Unifie pour la Liberation des Races Opprimées") consists of Montagnards and perhaps other ethnic minorities. It has been operating in Darlac Province, west-northwest of Ban Me Thuot along the Cambodian border, and reportedly is being supplied by night parachute drops. The NVA have thus far been unable to detect the aircraft.

(U) In July or August 1975, while Sgt THANG was at home in Can Tho on liberty, the city was shaken by tremendous explosions from the ammunition dump located approximately half way between Can Tho and Binh Thuy. This had been the largest ammunition dump in all of IV Corps. The explosions continued for over two hours, and the populace believed the area was being bombed by aircraft. As a result, a tight curfew was imposed on Can Tho, and the people were forbidden to move around the city, but were to remain in place for five days while an investigation was conducted. The number of casualties resulting from the blast was unknown but was the subject of much speculation. It was generally agreed that the explosions were the result of sabotage by resistance forces.

(U) This same ammunition storage area was attacked twice more in the following months -- in September 1975, causing explosions lasting for six hours, and again in December 1975, resulting in another half hour of explosions. After each attack a curfew was imposed in the Binh Thuy-Can Tho area.

(U) On another occasion, in November, while Sgt THANG was deployed to the Cam Ly airstrip at Da Lat, the ammunition dump there was blown up by resistance forces. Rockets, small arms ammo, and bombs exploded continuously from 1400 hours until approximately 1800 hours, while fires continued to burn until the following morning. No casualties were reported. THANG said the NVA later claimed to have captured three Montagnards, including a boy about 15 years old. The boy was said to have been caught with lengths of primer cord in his possession.

(U) There is also evidence that religious resistance groups are actively cooperating with military resistance organizations. An informant who is well known to Lt HAI told him that in early May 1975, the former Commander and Deputy Commander of IV Corps had turned over large amounts of arms and ammunition to elements of the Hoa Hao religious

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sect operating in Long Xuyen and Chau Doc Provinces. The informant said the Communists made an intensive search for the arms but were unable to locate them, adding that Hoa Hao groups were working closely with elements of the 33rd Regiment, mentioned above, in carrying out resistance activity.

... Among Former VNAF Personnel

(C) Former VNAF mechanics are indispensable to the NVAF; without them, the NVAF would be unable to fly or maintain any of the hundreds of captured VNAF aircraft. For that reason, the NVAF initially treated these men well, but eventually most of them became disillusioned after months of hardship, broken promises, and irregular wages.

(C) HAI and THANG believe that, if well led, the former VNAF mechanics could greatly hamper or even cripple air operations at former VNAF bases. Sgt THANG knows of many cases of sabotage committed by individual mechanics, much of it done in such a way that it would not be discovered for some time. For example, mechanics overtorque screws on both helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft or deliberately fail to

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treat parts properly for corrosion control. In one well-known incident, a former VNAF flight mechanic and aircraft tractor driver deliberately crushed CH-47 rotor blades with his tractor. Arrested by North Vietnamese security for gross negligence, the mechanic received three months imprisonment.

(C) The main deterrent to further sabotage efforts is the knowledge that, if successful, the sabotage could result in the serious injury or death of other former VNAF personnel on the aircraft. For that reason, and because of a constant watch by North Vietnamese security and planted informers, there has not thus far been a concerted effort to sabotage or destroy aircraft. However, Lt HAI believes that, if a well-led resistance movement should develop, the mechanics have the capacity to seriously undermine all NVAF air operations in South Vietnam.

... Among the Populace

(U) Evidence also exists of both active and passive resistance amongst the South Vietnamese populace. For example, there have been many reports of young female students luring NVA soldiers into ambush from

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My Tho, the Delta city where assassinations of NVA troops occur most frequently.

(U) An informant has told Lt HAI that many former ARVN soldiers who are now motorized pedicab drivers in Saigon are members of the resistance, as are some former Viet Cong who have become disenchanted with the way in which the Northerners have taken over.

(U) Around Binh Thuy Airbase and all over the city of Can Tho, the Communists put up posters saying "There is nothing more precious than independence and freedom." At night, the citizens alter the posters to read, "There is no independence and freedom."

... Quelling the Resistance

(U) Characteristically, the North Vietnamese lost no time taking strong steps to stamp out any manifestations of resistance. Beginning in July 1975 and continuing for the next six months, the NVA flew daily strikes against the resistance groups, using Cam Ly airstrip as a base of operations. The gunships were flown by former VNAF crews, but the gunners were NVA troops and the strikes were controlled by an NVA officer who flew as a passenger in a U-17. After the first week

of operations, UH-1 slicks airlifted troops into the D'Mrong area northwest of Da Lat in Tuyen Doc Province. THANG stated that the combination of air strikes and troop insertions was successful in relieving the pressure on Da Lat.

(U) During this same period, UH-1 gunships and slicks flew similar operations against the FULRO forces in Darlac Province. Other operations were conducted during September and October 1975 around Tanh Linh in Binh Thuan Province. THANG states that operations against resistance forces in the Da Lat area were still being conducted sporadically at the time of his escape in March 1976.

NORTH VIETNAMESE RELATIONS WITH OTHER  
COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

... With the Chinese

In view of the traditional, and apparently growing, Vietnamese dislike and distrust of the Chinese, it is not surprising that some information on this subject should surface in the debriefings of Lt HAI.

In early 1976, several North Vietnamese officers confided to HAI that North Vietnam was experiencing many difficulties in China. They told him of clashes between PRC and NVA troops in the Lang Son and Cao Bang areas on the northwestern border between the two countries. A major cause of the friction, according to the NVA cadre, was a Chinese demand that North Vietnam repay its debts to China in gold. Both North Vietnam and China expected to fall heir to South Vietnamese gold upon the collapse of the Government of South Vietnam, but this reportedly never came about.

China then demanded that North Vietnam return all the small arms, especially the AK-47s, that China had

supplied to the NVA; North Vietnam refused. It was then that the border outbreaks began. The clashes were reportedly serious enough to persuade North Vietnam to pull several NVA divisions out of South Vietnam and send them north in preparation for any emergency.

Exemplifying the apparent enmity between the two countries is the fact that Chinese troops have erected a huge statue of Chairman Mao Tse Tung on the border, with a hand pointing southward. In retaliation, the NVA erected an equally huge statue of Ho Chi Minh nearby, with the slogan, "There is nothing more precious than independence and freedom."

Several low-level cadre once confided to HAI that China resents North Vietnam's willingness to "donate" the port of Cam Ranh Bay to the USSR. Gossip in North Vietnamese officer circles says that North Vietnam had promised the USSR use of all former US ports in South Vietnam.

... The Spratly Issue

Another source of friction between China and North Vietnam revolves around ownership of the Spratly Islands,

which lie about midway between the Vietnamese landmass and the Philippines.

During a trip to Con Son Island, Lt HAI learned from several North Vietnamese that a number of high-ranking officers of the Joint General Staff were visiting the island to develop a contingency plan for the Spratly group in case China decided to enforce her claim to them.

If they ever had to face the Chinese on this issue, they envisioned the use of former South Vietnamese Navy ships, suitable for transporting helicopters, to carry a number of UH-1s for heliborne operations against the Chinese. The helicopters were to be piloted by former VNAF pilots.

The PRC had laid claim to some 2,000 islands in the South China Sea, including Con Son, Phu Quoc, and Poulou Yanmar, the site of the former US communications station. To back up the claim, Chinese naval vessels have reportedly visited the area.

Reacting to the Chinese claim, North Vietnamese Defense Minister VO NGUYEN GIAP declared that all

islands off the Vietnamese continental shelf belonged to the Vietnamese people and would be protected "to the last drop of blood."

... Chinese Reconstruction of Uong Bi Thermal Power Plant

The theme of gold recurs in a story HAI was told concerning Chinese assistance to North Vietnam in rebuilding the Uong Bi Thermal Power Plant, which had been heavily damaged by US airstrikes. After the reconstruction was completed, the North Vietnamese were thoroughly disgusted with the plant's inefficient and uneconomical operation. As one NVA cadre put it, they found that, for each measure of coal consumed, they received only about an equal amount of power.

According to the cadre, the Vietnamese found to their chagrin that the Chinese had discovered gold while rebuilding the plant and had secretly forged some of it into digging tools and other work implements. They then packaged the tools for shipment to the PRC. When their hosts requested tools and other equipment for a display commemorating the project, the Chinese hedged, thereby arousing Vietnamese suspicions. The tools were seized, the disguised gold discovered, and the North Vietnamese

demanded that the Chinese turn over all gold extracted from the site. The Chinese complied. The cadre commented that this was just another example of Chinese treachery.

While this story may well be propaganda for Vietnamese consumption, it is significant because it typifies the attitude of the North Vietnamese toward the Chinese.

... With the Cambodians

Friction between North Vietnam and her neighbors has not been limited to border clashes with China. Shortly after the collapse of South Vietnam, Cambodian forces invaded the island of Poulo Yanmar, some 50 to 60 miles south of Phu Quoc Island. The Cambodians reportedly killed 120 Vietnamese nationals living on the island, but NVA forces later reconquered it. Again, in June or July 1975, Vietnamese forces fought a short "war" with the Cambodian Communists over possession of Poulo Wai Island in the Gulf of Siam. Over a period of about a month, North Vietnamese pilots flew A-37s from Binh Thuy Air Base against the Cambodian forces. Each sortie consisted of four aircraft, each carrying two 250-pound general purpose bombs. Although the Vietnamese successfully captured the island, the Vietnamese Government eventually ceded it back to Cambodia as a fraternal gesture.

Beginning approximately in August 1975, the Vietnamese also were involved in continuing border clashes with the Cambodians in the area adjacent to Kien Giang and Chau Doc Provinces, primarily because of the establishment of "new economic zones" by the Vietnamese Government on lands claimed by the Cambodians. From August through December 1975, Lt HAI observed North Vietnamese A-37 missions launched against the Cambodians approximately twice a week. Ordinarily, the missions involved two aircraft, each loaded with two 250-pound general purpose bombs.

The latest instance of Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia took place on 25 February 1976, when Lt HAI was on a half-hour stopover at Bien Hoa. He observed fourteen MIG-21/FISHBED Js and 2 F5Es taking off in flights of two each over a fifteen-minute time frame, beginning at approximately 1400 hours. Each MIG carried belly tanks and what appeared to be two US-manufactured 250-pound general purpose bombs, one mounted under each wing. In conversation with a mechanic friend, Lt HAI asked where the aircraft were headed, and the response was "Cambodia."

It is interesting to note that the Khmer Communists accused the United States of bombing the provincial capital

of Siem Reap with F-111 aircraft on 25 February, the same day the above incident took place. Although the analytical community is aware of the coincidence, no correlation has yet been made.

... With the Cubans

Among all the Communist countries, the closest ties North Vietnam has are with Cuba. During Lt HAI's political indoctrination classes, the former VNAF pilots were told of the strong bond between the two countries. Much was made of Cuba's unwavering support of the North Vietnamese during the 1972-1973 bombings of Hanoi, as opposed to Soviet and Chinese advice that North Vietnam capitulate.

In addition to other types of economic assistance (See chapter on Economic and Political Conditions in Vietnam), Cuba is providing aid in reconstruction in North Vietnam, especially in housing projects for the workers.

In the area of military cooperation, HAI was told that, had the Communist victory not come so swiftly in Angola, Vietnam was prepared to send military forces to fight alongside the Cuban forces there. HAI says the Cuban presence is "almost everywhere," and gives as an example a Cuban anti-H bomb delegation and other groups of visitors he had encountered whom he was told were Cuban.

THE LINEBACKER II CAMPAIGN

... North Vietnamese Tactics Against the B-52

While attending political indoctrination classes at Binh Thuy, the 937th Regiment political officer, Captain BINH, discussed the threat posed by US B-52 bomb strikes and the measures adopted by the North Vietnamese to counter the threat.

BINH claimed that, in almost all cases, North Vietnamese air defenses were warned at least five minutes in advance which target the B-52s would strike.

According to BINH, the North Vietnamese considered the B-52 to be the United States' most dangerous weapon, especially after the city of Thanh Hoa and its airport were virtually obliterated by a single B-52 strike. Special tactics therefore had to be devised to counter this formidable threat.

The B-52s were able to jam North Vietnamese radars from as far as 40 miles away, thereby denying firing data to their SAMs and AAA. The North Vietnamese Air

Force therefore used a single MIG-21 to climb above the B-52 operating altitude and take a position over the strike force. The North Vietnamese ground radar would then track the MIG-21.

Normally, North Vietnamese SAM sites would fire only two SA-2 missiles at a single attacking fighter aircraft; in the case of B-52s, however, they fired "salvo after salvo." Their belief was that they could strike a considerable blow at the morale of the US Air Force and the American people if they could shoot down even one B-52. BINH claimed that, after twelve days of these tactics during the strikes of December 1972, the supply of SA-2s was almost depleted at the North Vietnamese SAM units.

North Vietnamese air-to-air tactics against the B-52s consisted of one or two MIG-21s attempting to lure away the F-4 escort while another MIG would make a pass on the B-52 strike force from a higher altitude. Capt BINH claimed that one B-52 had been shot down by a MIG-21.

... One More Week

Lt Hai gave eloquent testimony, learned from a high-ranking member of the North Vietnamese Ministry of Defense, of just how close North Vietnam came to capitulation at the height of the B-52 strikes mounted during late December 1972. One more week of bombing, this official insisted, would have decided the issue and forced the North Vietnamese to their knees. Both the Soviet and Chinese governments pressed the Vietnamese to sue for peace; only the Cubans supported the Vietnamese decision to gamble that the United States would not continue the strikes to the point of confrontation with the PRC.

How Lt HAI learned these startling facts came about this way: In early September 1975, on the occasion of North Vietnam's Independence Day, Maj Gen HOANG KHAM of the North Vietnamese Ministry of Defense arrived at Binh Thuy AB by MI-8 helicopter with a large personal party.

Later in the day, when the North Vietnamese discovered that they had no tennis players of their own to entertain the general, they recruited HAI to play with

him. Between sets of tennis, KHAM discussed the recent war with former Vietnamese Air Force officers. KHAM told them that "now that there is no more war, you're no longer our enemies, and there's nothing to hide of the bombing." He added, "the American bastards left only Gia Lam untouched. The other bases didn't even resemble airfields."

The general emphasized the seriousness of the North Vietnamese position during the bombing raids. He stated that one more week of bombing would have been intolerable. KHAM said that, prior to the signing of the Paris Accords, the USSR and PRC had pressed North Vietnam to remove the 300,000 North Vietnamese Army troops from South Vietnam and return to protracted guerrilla warfare. The North Vietnamese, however, viewed the US signing of the Paris Accords as a great victory and proof that they would eventually be victorious over South Vietnam.

General KHAM stated that the US bombing had destroyed all North Vietnamese industrial assets and forced much of their war machinery to be relocated in the mountains. He also mentioned that the sea lanes of communication had been effectively cut and that the Chinese rail link was

proving less and less effective, with the Chinese frequently stealing many of the items sent by the USSR. Also, he stated, at one time a US invasion of the North was feared as a real possibility. KHAM stressed the importance of Cuban-North Vietnamese friendship and said that Fidel Castro's 1972 visit had had a marked effect on North Vietnamese resolve, adding that Castro had correctly assessed the US position at the time.

This was not the first time HAI had heard these statements expressed. During his political indoctrination classes at Binh Thuy, he had been told more than once by Capt BINH that, had the LINEBACKER raids continued for one more week, a general retreat and cessation of hostilities would have been forced. BINH emphasized to the students that the degree of destruction of North Vietnamese air defenses and the industrial base was too extensive to permit prolonged resistance.

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